"For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined <u>he also called</u>, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30).

"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to <u>confirm your calling</u> and election, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall." (2 Peter 1:10).

"God is faithful by whom <u>you were called</u> into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9).

"Who saved us and <u>called us to a holy calling</u>, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Jesus Christ before the ages began." (2 Timothy 1:9).

"But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this <u>he called you</u> through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Each of the Bible verses above, while not an exhaustive list on our topic, teaches Christians that God, in His infinite love and grace as found in the Gospel, has called them out of the darkness of sin and granted them fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. This calling is a singular act of God, effectual in its outcome, and not a gradual process that believers experience over time. The call represents God's action, and it cannot be stopped! The call aligns with God's eternal purposes established before the foundations of the world. The Apostle Paul, in the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans, connects this call with God's predestination in the first part of verse 30. He writes, "And those whom he predestined he also called…" In other words, those elected, or predestined to belong to Jesus Christ, will indeed be called by God to fulfill His eternal purposes. In classical reformed theology, this call is known as the Effectual Call. It is effective in the sense that it achieves its intended purpose to gather the elect of God. This call differs from a general gospel call that goes out to all who hear it; some respond, while others do not. In the words of Christ, "For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:14).

This study on God's Effectual Call builds upon a previous study entitled "A Study on the Electing Grace of God." In that study, a list of what is often referred to in Reformed theology as

the order of salvation was provided. This list serves as a framework within theology, outlining a logical sequence of events by which God applies the benefits of Christ's redemption to His people. In this paper, the intention is to consider the second event. For your reference, the complete list of the "order of salvation" is provided below.

1) Election refers to God's choice of people to be saved.
2) **The Gospel Call (God calling sinners out of darkness).**
3) Regeneration (being born again).
4) Conversion (faith and repentance).
5) Justification (right legal standing).
6) Adoption (membership in God's family).
7) Sanctification (proper conduct of life).
8) Perseverance (remaining a Christian).
9) Death (going to be with Christ).

The verses quoted at the start of this paper indicate that the calling being described is not a powerless human calling. Professor John Murray provides a helpful definition of effectual calling in Volume 2 of his *Collected Writings* and *Systematic Theology*. Murray writes, "Calling is the efficacious summons on the part of God the Father, in accordance with and in pursuance of his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, addressed to sinners dead in trespasses and sins, a call that ushers them into fellowship with Christ and into possession of the salvation of which he is the embodiment; a call immutable in its character by reason of the purpose from which its proceeds and the bond it effects."[1]

This calling, as Murray explains, is more akin to a summons, which carries a much more authoritative tone than a simple call. It is also important to note that in Professor Murray's definition, he specifically designates God the Father as the initiator of this call. This conflicts with some theologians who insist that the Holy Spirit is the initiator of the call. In addition to this difference in understanding, John Murray's definition emphasizes the "efficacious summons" as a one-time act of God the Father. This differs from those who believe the call is a continuing

[1] John Murray, Vol. 2 *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977) 165

process or work of the Holy Spirit of God. Murray's understanding of God's effectual call to the sinner differs from other theological perspectives.

For example, the Westminster Shorter Catechism provides an alternative definition. In question thirty-one, it asks: "What is effectual calling?" The catechism's answer reads as follows: "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our will, he does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel." This definition attributes effectual calling to the work of the Holy Spirit and describes it as an ongoing process rather than a singular act. The emphasis of the catechism's answer is on the subjective effects on the individual called. For example, "convincing us of our sin," "enlightening our minds," and "renewing our wills."

Now, the question one might ask is whether this matters. My answer is that, while sincere and godly believers can and do disagree on this issue and others, it is always wise to compare Scripture with Scripture to humbly ascertain God's truth! In the catechism's view, there is a work of "convincing," "enlightening," and "renewing." This suggests that ongoing work is taking place. I believe this is more akin to progressive sanctification in the believer. It appears that the catechism emphasizes the results of the call to the believer rather than the eternal call itself. I believe this understanding is not supported by Romans 8:29-30, quoted at the beginning of this paper. I assert that in each of the five verbs listed in these verses, the apostle emphasizes the divine initiative in God's eternal purposes. I've included the text below again to highlight what has been referred to by some as the "golden chain of salvation." Here is Romans 8:29,30 once again. Notice the essential connections that the Holy Spirit includes together.

"For those whom he **foreknew**, he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he **predestined** he also **called,** and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he **justified** he also **glorified**." (Romans 8:29-30).

The first link in the chain of salvation is God's work of foreknowing. This paper's objective is to study the second event in the order of salvation, rather than the "chain of salvation" discussed in Chapter 8 of the book of Romans. It should be noted that the foreknowledge mentioned in verse 29 does NOT refer to God foreseeing who will believe and, as a consequence, predestinating them to eternal life based on their faith. Many hold to this

inaccurate view, which posits that man is the author of his salvation. I believe this error detracts from the honor and glory due to the sovereign God of salvation. Douglas Moo, Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, is correct in his comments on this verse. He writes, "With this first verb, then, Paul highlights the divine initiative in the outworking of God's purposes."[2]

The Apostle Paul moves from foreknowledge to predestination. This is God's work in electing some to everlasting life. This is the great truth that the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the church at Ephesus: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he ***chose us in him before the foundation of the world***, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, ***he predestined us*** for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." (Ephesians 1:3-4). The verb predestined in the Greek New Testament (προώρισεν), translated, means to 'decide beforehand.' (BAGD). It is used in the aorist, or past tense, along with the other verbs in the "chain," including glorification! The book of Acts has a fitting parallel to the use of predestined in Romans 8:30: "But everything they did was **determined beforehand** according to your will." (Acts 4:28).

What is essential to see in the "salvation chain," particularly as we consider the next word "call," is not the results of something God knew beforehand (foreknowledge), but rather the events themselves that God planned before the beginning of time! All these blessed events were planned before time existed for the glory and praise of God! In systematic theology, the planning of salvation among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which occurred before the creation of the world, is referred to as the Covenant of Redemption. The entire "chain" should be understood from God's perspective, not man's. Unlike mankind, the eternal and triune God is not limited to the constraints of time. Foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification, planned by God in eternity past, have already been accomplished from God's perspective! All of these sovereign actions of the infinite and eternal God precede any act of faith on the part of man! This is the sovereignty of God in salvation! We should never forget that "salvation belongs to the Lord" (Psalm 3:8).

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[2] Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 533.

Unlike God, we, while living our lives in the flesh, are limited by time. While the eternal counsel of our sovereign God will always be fulfilled, the effectual call of God is experienced in a believer's life at a specific time and place. As we have written, this is done at God's choosing and not our own. This calling's **results** are the event in time that brings the believer into union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Along with the eternal purpose planned before time existed, the second important consideration of calling is this union that the believer has with the Savior. This union, as a result of calling, must still be understood as the work of God the Father and His grace. John Murray provides a helpful description that appropriately focuses on calling as it pertains to God's work, rather than our own doing. He writes regarding the effectual call, "The accent that falls upon God as the author should advise us that we may not define the act in terms of our response, nor in terms of the subjectively operative factors necessary to constrain that response. In this respect, calling is to be coordinated with justification and adoption. Neither of these takes place apart from faith. Yet neither is to be defined in terms of faith, nor in terms of the convicting, enlightening, and renewing operations of the Spirit necessary to faith. The same is true of calling."[3]

Is it essential for us to distinguish between the Father and the Holy Spirit as the authors of the effectual call? Allow me to let Professor Murray answer the question. "The fact that calling is the act of God the Father apprizes us that God the Father is the specific agent in the initiatory act of application, and when this is not perceived or sufficiently appreciated, we rob our faith of an all-important element in the economy of salvation. We think of the Father's love in election, of His love in sparing not His own Son, in making Him sin for us. We are overwhelmed with adoring amazement. But let us not overlook God the Father's love in the initial act of salvation that we possess. It is He who constitutes the bond with the Savior and therefore puts us in possession of all that the Savior is. It is of the Father that Christ is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." This does not at all minimize the work of God the Holy Spirit in salvation, which is clearly evident in regeneration.

To summarize, the effectual call is the work of God the Father. How does this call come to someone from the Father? His call reaches people through the gospel, and when the gospel is read or preached with power, those predestined to eternal life respond with the obedience of faith. Some critics of the biblical teaching on predestination and effectual calling argue that if

[3] "Murray, Vol. 2 Collected Writings,165."

God performs this work, there is no need for evangelism. There could be nothing further from the truth! John Stott, in his helpful commentary on the Book of Romans, sheds light on this topic. Stott writes, "So evangelism (the preaching of the gospel), far from being rendered superfluous by God's predestination, is indispensable, because it is the very means God has ordained by which his call comes to his people and awakens their faith."[4]

The focus of this paper has been on the effectual call made by God before the foundations of the world. In accordance with the classical Reformed position on the order of salvation discussed earlier, this has been the objective. This call is referred to as the internal call. In concluding this paper, a brief mention should be made of what is often referred to as the external call, or universal call. In Reformed theology, the external call refers to the general proclamation of the gospel to all people. It is the invitation, command, and exhortation presented to everyone who hears the message of Christ, proclaiming the need to repent of their sins and believe in Him for forgiveness and eternal life. This call is rooted in what is known as the "Great Commission" given to the disciples of Christ after His bodily resurrection. "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20).

Perhaps no other parable of Christ in the New Testament illustrates the general call as well as the "Parable of the Great Banquet." Below is the account given in its entirety:

He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, **14** and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

When one of those who reclined at the table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet, he sent his servant[c] to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and

[4] John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1994), 252.

see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you,[d] none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'" (Luke 14:12-24).

Dear Reader, At this very moment, God is inviting you to a sumptuous feast! Will you come? Or are you, like the characters in the parable, finding excuses for why you can't repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? The call of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been made to you. Are you tired and weary of your sins and guilt? Do you think about death and what follows afterward? Or do you ignore and suppress the guilt? Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30). Oh, how great is the love of God! Jesus died on a wooden cross to bear the punishment for sinners. The sinless, perfect Son of God took upon Himself sin and gave to all who believe His righteousness! Peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ! What a great exchange! Wait no longer, my friend, the call of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has come to you. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9).